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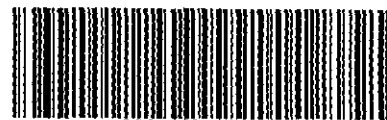
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ECLA'S ACTIVITIES IN CONNEXION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS  
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Note by the secretariat

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### Introduction

The holding of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972 and the decisions of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session in December of the same year to establish the United Nations Environment Programme and create institutions to administer it, mark the end of the long process of preparation needed to define the principal environmental issues, make an initial evaluation of their magnitude, and explore ways and means of tackling them through concerted international action.

International co-operation for the preservation and improvement of the environment has now become a new area of concern for the United Nations. The responsibility falls in the first instance on the Governing Council of the Programme and on the special secretariat, whose Executive Director is responsible for co-ordinating, in accordance with the guidelines handed down by the Council, environmental programmes within the United Nations system.

In its resolution on this subject, the General Assembly stresses the importance of regional co-operation and the role to be played by the regional economic commissions.

The purpose of the present note is to present a brief description of the preparatory stage of the Stockholm Conference, the principal conclusions arrived at in the Conference, and the role played by the Latin American Governments and the ECLA secretariat in this process. It will also present some preliminary ideas on future activities, to assist the Commission in adopting such decisions as it may deem appropriate in this respect.

#### 1. The preparatory phase

Although the United Nations has for a long time been concerned with some of the issues that today come under the common heading of the environment, it was only in 1968 that the issue began to be discussed specifically in the Economic and Social Council and in the General Assembly which, in December 1968, decided to accept the invitation of the Government of Sweden and convene a conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972.

With a view to the preparation and organization of the Conference, the Assembly decided in the following year to set up a Preparatory Committee and asked the Secretary-General to establish a small Conference secretariat. The Latin American countries setting on the Preparatory Committee, which comprised 27 representatives of Governments, were Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Mexico.

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Once the Committee and the secretariat had been established, work began immediately on the preparation of the agenda and documentation. All the material prepared by the secretariat in consultation with Governments, specialists, working groups and seminar was discussed thoroughly by the Preparatory Committee and had thus already won a large degree of acceptance before it reached Stockholm, consequently facilitating final agreement on it.

Also involved in these activities were several departments of the United Nations, the secretariats of the regional economic commissions, the specialized agencies, and certain intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

(a) The environment and development

Public concern regarding the problems of the environment was first voiced in the economically more developed countries, where pollution resulting from industrial and technological progress, the growth of the urban sprawl, and the rapid increase in consumption, was such that prompt action was essential.

In the less industrialized countries, in contrast, the environment as a general rule did not receive much attention, either because problems were not so striking or because the importance of other issues relegated them to the background.

Hence, when the United Nations began to take up these matters many doubts were expressed regarding the interest of the developing countries in participating in an international campaign to tackle environmental problems. What is more, some considered that international action on a large scale would distract world attention and siphon off resources that would otherwise go to promote development.

Nevertheless, in discussions in the General Assembly and the Preparatory Committee it soon became evident that the developing countries wished to join in the collective endeavour, both because environmental problems were becoming more acute in their countries too, although with different characteristics, and also because they considered that issues like that of the environment transcended national frontiers and the measures the industrialized countries might take to protect their environment could have an adverse effect upon them.

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Even so, a number of questions remained unsolved regarding the characteristics of environment problems in the economically more advanced developing countries and the relation between these problems and development. In order to help clarify matters, the Secretary-General of the Conference invited a group of distinguished specialists from different fields and regions of the world to meet at Founex, Switzerland, from 4 to 12 June 1971.

In the report on this meeting, the experts stressed that the major environmental problems of developing countries stem from poverty and very lack of development of their societies. In their view, "in both the towns and the countryside, not merely the 'quality of life' but life itself is endangered by poor water, housing, sanitation and nutrition, by sickness and disease and by natural disasters. These are problems, no less than those of industrial pollution, that clamour for attention in the context of the concern with human environment". From the above it is evident, as the experts stated, that "in large measure, the kind of environmental problems that are of importance in developing countries are those that can be overcome by the process of development itself", and that in consequence "concern for environment must not and need not detract from the commitment of the world community ... to the overriding task of development of the developing regions of the world".

The experts, however, did not overlook the fact that the developing countries do have problems of pollution, both in rural and urban areas, that are caused by the process of development itself, when development is badly planned and unregulated.

The experts also indicated that the concern with the human environment in the developing countries should serve to give new dimensions to the whole concept of development, which should be an integrated concept incorporating, among other social goals, the environment issue.

Another topic examined was the implications for international economic relations of the action that has been taken and will be taken in the future with regard to the environment, particularly as regards the possible adverse effects on the developing countries in the fields of trade, aid and the transfer of technology.

There can be no doubt that the meeting of the Panel of Experts at Founex fulfilled the task entrusted to it and that its views, conclusions and recommendations were very useful in clarifying problems that are of key interest to the less developed nations.

(b) Action in Latin America

Simultaneously with the work of the Preparatory Committee and the Secretariat of the Conference, numerous activities were carried out in each region in order to gain a better knowledge of environmental problems. In response to a request from the United Nations, many Latin American Governments prepared reports on the state of the environment in their countries, and these were subsequently taken into consideration in the preparation of the basic documents for the Conference.

ECLA placed the topic on the agenda of its fourteenth session (Santiago, Chile, April 1971), at which it considered a note by the secretariat (E/CN.12/898) which emphasized the importance of this topic for the region and gave an account of the work in progress in connexion with the preparations for the World Conference.

At this session the Commission considered that the efforts of Latin American countries to improve the environment should be linked to those being undertaken at the world level and to the national development objectives of each country. As it felt that the precise nature, origin and consequences of the environmental problems of the countries of the region should be clarified during the preparatory phase of the Conference, the Commission recommended that Governments should take the necessary steps to ensure effective participation by the countries of the region in the Stockholm Conference, and it urged them to co-operate through the secretariat of the Commission, the work of preparing and holding the Conference and in the Regional Seminar sponsored by the Preparatory Committee which was to be held in Mexico at the invitation of the Mexican Government. It also requested the secretariat to continue its studies and co-ordination work in the matter (resolution 301(XIV)).

Among the measures taken to clarify the environmental problems of the region may be mentioned the seminar held in Antigua, Guatemala on the environment and development in Central America. This seminar, which was organized by the Central American Institute of Science and Technology with the co-operation of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States, attracted a large number of participants from inside and outside the region and considered a series of documents and reports, presented by their authors, on topics related to the main theme. A set of specific recommendations was adopted regarding national action and regional co-operation in connexion with the environment in such aspects as statistics and information; industrial, agricultural, and service industries development; quality of living; education; research and planning.

/In pursuance

In pursuance of the plan to hold consultative meetings in all the developing regions, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment jointly organized the Latin American Regional Seminar on Problems of the Human Environment and Development (Mexico City, 6-11 September 1971), which was sponsored by the Government of Mexico. The Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), the FAO Regional Office for Latin America, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) all collaborated in this meeting.

The seminar was of special importance, since at it government experts from the entire region reviewed Latin America's environmental problems as a whole for the first time and endeavoured to identify common points of view, thus facilitating the work of the Latin American delegations at the Stockholm Conference.

As a contribution to the work of the Seminar, the ECLA secretariat, with the collaboration of ILPES and the FAO Regional Office, prepared a document entitled "The human environment and economic development in Latin America" (ST/ECLA/Conf.40/L.2), which is a general analysis of the environmental situation in Latin America and its main problems, with a review of some possible international consequences.

The relations between the environment and development constituted the main theme of the Seminar and the conclusions reached were in line, generally speaking, with the main findings of the meeting of experts held at Founex. Starting from the basic assertion that the existence of unfavourable conditions for human life in the Latin American countries is due basically to their situation as developing countries, which is in itself a consequence of the internal conditions peculiar to each country and the way in which they participate in the system of international economic relations, it was concluded that efforts should be centred on the promotion of development.

It was recognized that economic theory is still seeking answers to problems in the fields of economic development and protection of the environment, so that the greatest caution is called for in tackling these problems but at the same time it was stressed that solutions must be found which are expressed in terms of a socially integrated planning system for development.

Planning was the central point of the discussions on internal measures, and a number of comments and recommendations were made in this connexion, emphasizing that consideration must be given to environmental problems within the framework of both general planning and rural and urban planning. It was also stressed that similarly, when incorporating environmental considerations in development planning, the criteria and minimum standards of environmental protection must be established in accordance with the conditions and systems of values of each country. This was a recognition of the danger of generalizing about the situation of the countries of the region, with their differences of size, resources and modes of development, and likewise of indiscriminately adopting the standards prevailing in advanced countries, which might prove ill-adapted and of disproportionate social cost, although they might be attractive in terms of the prestige and financial support which usually accompany them.

Possible adverse effects on external trade as a result of the environmental policies of the major centres were discussed, and concern was expressed regarding the transfer of technology, which, it was felt, could be strongly influenced by the anti-pollution measures required in the industrial centres, which might prove a heavy burden for local budgets and distort priorities. In the same context, interest was displayed in a possible clearer trend towards the relocation of some industrial activities as a result of the desire of some centres to get rid of highly contaminating industries. Some countries expressed apprehension over the possible influx of "dirty" industries, whereas others, with vast semi-empty territories, saw in this an opportunity for increased employment and income.

In the face of these indirect effects of international environmental protection measures, the Latin American countries placed emphasis on the need to take advantage of the favourable flow of external aid in this field, pointing out, however, that such aid must not be at the expense of development aid. The principle of the "additionality" of aid for the conservation of the environment was thus incorporated in regional proposals: a principle which was later to be defended vigorously by the developing regions at the Conference.

In dealing with all these topics, it was noted that Latin America does not possess adequate information for taking decisions as regards the environment. The corollary to this was the unanimous appeal made for more interchange of information in this field and for more research, training and general education. All this highlighted the important role of the international, and especially the regional agencies.

/Lastly, international

Lastly, international co-operation at both the regional and world levels was extensively dealt with. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for the countries of the region to effect the greatest possible interchange of information and on the need for international technical and financial co-operation to help the developing countries, including those of Latin America, to solve their environmental problems and minimize the negative effects on developing countries of measures adopted by the industrialized countries for the protection of their environment.

Representatives of all the member States of the Commission took part in the Seminar. At the end of the meeting, the representatives of the developed countries requested that the report should place on record the fact that they had sent representatives to the Seminar in their capacity as members of the Commission and because of the interest of their countries in learning the opinions of the other participants, but their delegations had not taken part in the discussions and had played no part in the preparation or adoption of the report.

The specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the regional inter-governmental organizations also actively assisted the Latin American countries in the preparatory phase of the Conference and provided the Secretary-General with data on regional conditions in their different spheres of activity. The Organization of American States and the Pan-American Health Organization organized a Technical seminar on urban development and environmental change (Washington, D.C., 15-19 November 1971).

The Latin American scientific community was also active. Regional representatives took part in the working group convened by a special committee of the International Association of Scientific Societies on environmental problems in developing countries (Canberra, August 1971).

## 2. The Stockholm Conference and the decisions of the General Assembly

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which was held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972, was attended by representatives of 113 States who discussed a wide range of environmental situations and problems throughout the world.

The Conference concentrated on three main points on which the secretariat, in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Preparatory Committee, had prepared basic documents summarizing the wealth of material deriving from the work of that Committee itself, reports of seminars

/and expert



and expert meetings, and studies conducted by the secretariats of the United Nations and specialized agencies. The three points were as follows: Declaration on the Environment, Action Plan, and institutional and financial arrangements for United Nations action.

The purpose of the Declaration was not only to proclaim the importance of preserving a suitable environment for the spiritual and material development of mankind, but also to define the rights and duties of individuals and States in an area that had not received the attention it deserved in the past and whose repercussions were not easy to specify. Hence the difficulty of reaching the agreement which, despite laborious preparations, was only arrived at in Stockholm after lengthy debate.

The object of the Action Plan was to bring together in a single document all the basic elements needing to be included in programmes of Governments, the United Nations and specialized agencies in order to solve the most pressing environmental problems. The 109 recommendations contained in the Plan adopted by the Conference appear under the following broad headings:

1. Human settlements
2. Natural resources
3. Pollutants of broad international significance
4. Educational, informational, social and cultural aspects
5. Development and environment.

Finally, the Conference adopted a series of recommendations on institutional and financial arrangements for concerted international action within the framework of the United Nations. The recommendations suggest the establishment of a Governing Council for Environmental Programmes, whose main functions would be to promote international co-operation and provide general policy guidelines for the direction and co-ordination of environmental programmes, and of an environment secretariat headed by an Executive Director entrusted inter alia, with the responsibility to provide substantive support and, under the guidance of the Governing Council, to co-ordinate environmental programmes within the United Nations system, keep their implementation under review and assess their effectiveness.

The recommendations also called for the creation of a voluntary Environment Fund for the additional financing of environmental programmes, of certain initiatives undertaken within the United Nations system, and of such programmes of general interest as regional and global monitoring, assessment and data-collecting systems, improvement of environmental

quality management and other programmes quoted as examples, emphasizing that in their implementation due account should be taken of the special need of the developing countries.

In order to provide for the most efficient co-ordination of United Nations environmental programmes, the Conference recommended that an Environmental Co-ordinating Board should be established under the auspices and within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination.

With regard to the institutional arrangements, it stressed the importance of regional co-operation and of the role to be played by the regional economic commissions and other inter-governmental organizations. The relevant resolution makes this point and invites the regional economic commissions and the United Nations Economic and Social Office in Beirut to intensify their environmental efforts.

At its twenty-seventh session, the General Assembly considered the Conference report, adopted its recommendations with slight modifications, and took decisions on certain matters that the Conference had left pending 1/.

Under the terms of the Assembly resolution, the Governing Council for Environmental Programmes will be composed of 58 members elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms on the following basis:

- (a) Sixteen seats for African States;
- (b) Thirteen seats for Asian States;
- (c) Ten seats for Latin American States;
- (d) Thirteen seats for Western European and other States;
- (e) Six seats for Eastern European States.

The Assembly approved the creation of a United Nations Environment Programme and decided to locate its secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya. Mr. Maurice Strong, who had been Secretary-General of the Conference, was designated as the secretariat's first Executive Director on the proposal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was designated as the secretariat's first Executive Director.

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1/ Document E/CN.12/953 contains the operative part of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) on institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation. Representatives can obtain copies of the recommendations of the Action Plan from the secretariat.

The recommendations regarding the establishment of the Environment Fund and the Environmental Co-ordinating Board were adopted as submitted by the Conference.

The General Assembly also agreed to draw the attention of Governments and of the Governing Council for Environmental Programmes to the Declaration of the Stockholm Conference and to refer the Action Plan to the Governing Council for appropriate action (resolution 2994 (XXVII)).

The other decisions of the General Assembly concerning the Conference and the environment included resolution 2995 (XXVII) on co-operation between States in the field of the human environment and 2996 (XXVII) on international responsibility of States. These supplement and clarify some parts of the Declaration of the Stockholm Conference on which certain delegations had expressed different views.

### 3. Future action

The establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme has provided the United Nations system with the institutions and instruments for undertaking the international effort required to endeavour to solve the serious problems which are affecting a large part of the human race.

The main responsibility for these tasks falls on the Governing Council, the environment secretariat and its Executive Director, but it must be borne in mind that the Programme was conceived as a collective task in which, in addition to the new bodies established, various other United Nations offices and specialized agencies are participating.

The environment secretariat is at present studying the programme of work which it is to present at the meeting of the Governing Council in Geneva in June 1973. This programme will be based on the Action Plan adopted at Stockholm in which, as already noted, recommendations are made and responsibilities are assigned not only to the United Nations itself but also to the specialized agencies.

Since in the recommendations of the Stockholm Conference and the General Assembly decisions special importance is attached to the action to be taken in each region, and within this context the economic commissions are given a vital role to play, the ECLA secretariat has redoubled its efforts to gain a better knowledge of the general nature of the environmental

/problems in

problems in Latin America. In close contact with the Executive Director of the Programme, it has been studying ways of organizing its work in this field and co-ordinating it with the work of the environment secretariat.

The secretariat of the Commission has considered a number of topics capable of constituting a programme for which the necessary instruments could gradually be provided. In choosing these topics it has taken special account of the interest shown by governments and the studies which the secretariat itself has been carrying out on various aspects of development problems and on matters related to specific problems of the human environment.

The subjects considered are as follows:

(a) Development and the human environment

This is a very general subject which, in addition to the analysis and study in greater depth of the relationship between the human environment and development, about which only very superficial information is available, embraces many areas of research, such as methodologies for the analysis of the environment, and the introduction of the human environment concept in planning systems and development strategies. The latter question is obviously of great importance to governments, which will frequently have to decide between, or try to reconcile, environmental goals and other options which may be open to them.

(b) Evaluation of the human environment situation

The Latin American Governments are currently engaged in the task of evaluating the situation regarding the human environment in their respective countries and formulating policies to solve the problems arising in this connexion. In order to perform this task, they have decided to establish special offices, or even to set up sub-secretariats or inter-governmental committees.

Since this is a completely new field, there were no well-known existing methods for undertaking the evaluations, and this has constituted a serious obstacle in this task. The ECLA secretariat is therefore studying the matter in co-ordination with the United Nations Human Environment Programme so as to be able to co-operate effectively with Governments if the latter so request.

Once sufficient progress has been made in the country evaluations, the next step might be to prepare periodic reports on the human environment situation in the whole region.

(c) Regional development and the human environment

ECLA and the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) have recently devoted particular attention to the problems of the spatial distribution of development, with the object of collaborating with governments in their attempts to eliminate internal disequilibria, which manifest themselves in the existence of backward areas, unutilized resources and cases of extreme inefficiency in the system of population settlement.

An analysis of the environment would enrich these studies with the ecological variable, which has hitherto been only partially or indirectly considered yet is of vital importance in this context, since the regions must be considered as ecosystems, with a certain well-defined potential and with laws and relationships that cannot be ignored or violated without running the risk of incurring unforeseeable costs.

The studies which the secretariat proposes to carry out on this subject relate not only to regions in the interior of individual countries, but also to broader regions which constitute economically and socially important ecosystems, such as the humid tropical forests and the high Andean plateau (the altiplano). These studies and projects will not, of course, be undertaken except with the agreement of the government concerned.

(d) Urbanization and the environment

The problems posed by human settlements in urban areas have been described as among the most serious facing Latin America, and they are becoming increasingly difficult to solve owing to the rapid growth of the urban population, which in every country has grown faster than total population. ECLA and ILPES have both been working on such aspects of human settlements as urban planning, metropolitanization and marginalism. Henceforth these studies, which are to continue, will concentrate on environmental problems.

(e) Environmental aspects of the use of resources (particularly water and energy)

For many years there has been an ECLA programme in which the secretariat has collaborated with governments in the search for solutions to problems of natural resources, especially water and energy.

The secretariat will be stepping up its activities in this field in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme. Emphasis will be placed on environmental aspects, and an integrated approach to natural resources will be used.

(f) The population and the environment

There has been a great deal of controversy over the relationship between the population and the environment; in the absence of any proper study, the most dogmatic statements of one kind or another have been expressed at times, and observations that only apply to specific cases have been elevated to the rank of generally applicable conclusions.

The secretariat intends to study and help to clarify this matter as part of the preparatory work for the World Population Conference to be held in 1974.

(g) Industries and technology

The environmental implications of industrial and technological development in Latin America need to be taken into account to an ever-increasing degree. ECLA will have to bear this in mind in its general studies and consider carrying out special studies on the subject.

(h) International economic relations and the environment

All countries, and especially the developing countries, gave this matter special attention both during the preparatory stage and during the Stockholm Conference itself, where UNCTAD and GATT were requested to continue their studies on this question. It is with these organizations that the secretariat of the Commission will co-operate in its research into the implications for Latin America.

As already stated, the United Nations Environment Programme is a joint venture in which many inter-governmental organizations and scientific and academic institutions must co-operate with governments. This applies equally at the regional level, and ECLA's final programme will thus have to take into account the work of other agencies and the co-operation that can be arranged with them.

Regional bodies that are concerned in one way or another with environmental problems include such United Nations agencies as WHO (through the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau), FAO, UNESCO and WMO, and such inter-American organizations as OAS and IDB. The secretariat is taking steps to conclude as quickly as possible the co-operative arrangements that it considers indispensable for effective international action in Latin America.

Finally, the secretariat would like to point out that its reorganization plans, which are currently being studied, entail the enlargement of divisions and programmes that have been directly concerned with environmental matters, especially natural resources, energy and regional and urban development.

This will not suffice, however, to fulfil the mandate ECLA has received or the tasks which the United Nations Environment Programme expects it to carry out. It will therefore be necessary to create a small unit for co-ordinating ECLA's various environmental activities and ensuring that they serve a common purpose.